

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a pattern that roughly outlines the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Changing security governance

Lessons for external support from Southeast Asia,
Southern Africa, and Latin America

SARAH BROCKMEIER AND PHILIPP ROTMANN

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- This paper argues that creating informal dialogue platforms can constitute an effective way of pursuing a political approach to external support of security sector governance and reforms (SSG/R). Based on a cross-cutting evaluation of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's (FES) work on SSG/R over the last decade, this paper presents concrete examples of engagement in security sector reform processes from Asia, Latin America, and Southern Africa.
- The paper distinguishes between two interrelated approaches to stimulating change in the security sector: supporting regional dialogue, and strengthening national constituencies for change. Based on the experience of FES, this paper develops four ideal-typical contexts that can be used as a guideline for selecting the most realistic possibilities and most promising shape of SSG/R work.
- This paper finds that regional dialogue work can enable broader open discussions on necessary reforms, even in a climate of »closing spaces.« Regional discussions can generate entry points by including broader issues related to (in)security and safety, building trust and networks among actors from the security sector, politics and civil society.
- This regional work can eventually trigger national-level dialogue and inject ideas into national conversations on SSG/R. Where there are national actors with the capacity and ambition for political change, sustained and long-term support to reform constituencies can enable thorough reform debates on a national level and, in some cases, lead to the eventual formulation of concrete policy proposals for better security sector governance.



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1. Introduction

Can national and regional dialogue supported by external actors spark change toward security sector governance and reform (SSG/R)? Can outside actors effectively support national reform constituencies in advocating for SSG/R? This paper argues that under the right conditions, informal dialogue platforms, organized with a long-term and flexible approach, can support reform ambitions and open up the possibility of addressing national political reform agendas. Where these windows of opportunity then exist, external actors can effectively support national reform constituencies. Based on a cross-cutting evaluation of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's (FES) work over the last decade², this paper presents concrete examples of engagement in reform processes in the security sector from Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Southern Africa.

Since the late 1990s, security sector governance and reform programs have become essential elements of international and national peacebuilding and stabilization endeavors. Despite laudable objectives, including promoting security for the state and citizens, as well as holding security actors accountable for human rights and rule of law commitments, the fragility of local politics means that these original aims are not always met. In practice, technical »train and equip« approaches are applied primarily towards improving the effectiveness of state security actors, while efforts to enhance democratic control and oversight mechanisms are neglected. Instead of supporting long-term political transformation processes, which would work towards the objectives of SSG/R, such technical programs may entrench the status quo of exclusive security provision, impunity, and human rights violations in the long run. Against this background, experts in the development and security communities agree that cases of successful SSG/R programs are rare. They acknowledge that one of the biggest challenges is the tendency of donors to support »train and equip« approaches, and the lack of comprehensive political approaches to incrementally make security sectors more accountable, effective, and responsive to the needs of their citizens.

This paper outlines two cases in which FES implemented a political approach to SSG/R in practice, and experienced success within enabling political conditions. These two approaches are: supporting regional and national dialogues on SSG/R, and investing into national reform

constituencies. To illustrate the first approach, this paper describes the work of FES, in cooperation with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), on the Inter-Parliamentary Forum on Security Sector Governance in Southeast Asia (IPF-SSG, 2006-2016), the Maputo Dialogue (since 2010) supporting the Southern African Defence and Security Management Network (SADSEM) in the region of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the national and regional dialogue work of FES in Latin America between 2003 and today. These cases show that organizing inclusive regional-level dialogue on security sector governance can provide important entry points for national-level conversations on security sector governance and reform. On the other hand, the work by FES in El Salvador, particularly on the community level in the district of Santa Tecla, demonstrates the second approach of supporting national constituencies for change.

The paper is organized in four sections. The first part will outline the regional contexts for SSG/R work in Southeast Asia, Southern Africa and Latin America. Section two will outline FES activities on security sector governance – both in terms of dialogue work and national constituency support. A third section will present the outputs and results of their work, while the final section will describe the challenges and lessons experienced and learned by FES.

As a German political foundation, FES has a number of specific characteristics. Since it is driven by social democratic values, FES and its partner organizations approach SSG/R and security provision challenges from a comprehensive, democratic governance angle. While the foundation also works with security institutions, FES' core partners are civilian actors (political parties, parliaments, independent oversight bodies, civil society organizations, media, and academic actors). Given their relatively stable funding structure, FES and other political foundations in Germany are able to provide partnerships on a long-term and flexible basis. While most external donors do not share these comparative advantages, they might still be able to draw lessons from the work of the foundation. Most details on and lessons learned from FES programs presented in this paper are the result of an internal evaluation that the authors conducted for the foundation. By sharing these lessons more widely, FES strives to enrich the debate on second- and third-generation SSG/R approaches and hopes to inform practitioners, experts, and

academics concerned with strengthening political assistance to democratic security governance.

2. The Wider Regional Security Contexts for SSG/R

The environments in which FES has worked over the past fifteen years vary widely: Southeast Asia, Southern Africa and Latin America include countries with a wide spectrum of socio-economic development levels, political systems, and civic cultures. In Southeast Asia, the countries that participated in the foundation's regional dialogues include Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and later also Myanmar. This range includes low-income countries such as Myanmar and Cambodia, middle-income countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam, and Singapore, which has one of the world's highest GDP per capita rates. Many of the participating Southeast Asian countries shared recent and, in some cases, incomplete democratic transitions in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as democratic reversals in the 2000s.³ They also shared similar challenges regarding security sector reform, including weak legislatures and judiciaries, corruption, and a strong role for the armed forces in the political system. In most of these countries, the constitution formally provides for parliamentary control over the security sector, but given the historical prominence of military dictatorship in these countries, the responsible parliamentarians and parliamentary staffers often lack the political power, knowledge, or even the ambition to exercise such control.⁴ Committee memberships change constantly, making it hard for any one parliamentarian to specialize in security affairs. In several countries, including Thailand and the Philippines, coups or attempted coups have been a regular occurrence. A military junta that came to power in a 2014 coup currently rules Thailand.

While the SADC region includes upper-middle income countries such as South Africa and Botswana, the region remains economically weak overall. Problems with illicit trafficking, transnational crime, and a lack of public security are shared throughout the region, requiring security governance responses that take into account the border-crossing nature of these challenges. While formally, almost all countries (except Swaziland) are democracies, the political reality spans from consolidated democracies to authoritarian rule. Almost all SADC countries are dominated by single majority-rule parties that typically use

their historical leadership role against apartheid to claim sole legitimacy to rule. Parliaments, MPs, and opposition parties are often sidelined and do not exercise an oversight function.⁵ Parliamentary committees as formalities treat most issues related to defense, as both parliamentarians and government officials consider these issues to be at the core of the responsibilities of the executive. In some SADC countries, debating defense budgets »is considered as tantamount to questioning the legitimacy of the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.«⁶ Where there have been attempts for security sector reforms, they have not been driven by national governments, but by donors such as the World Bank, the United Nations, or larger bilateral donors in line with each donor's individual mix of political interests. There are two primary reasons for this. First, national institutions as well as civil society actors often lack the capacity to carry out or push for major reforms.⁷ Furthermore, social and economic issues are often seen as more pressing than the security sector, even though these agendas are very much linked.⁸

In many countries across Latin America, the need for reforming the relationship between the formal security sector, the state, and society at large is evident in every-day life. The relationships between constituencies and their security forces are characterized by mistrust. Legal arrangements governing security institutions and mechanisms to sanction security forces' misconduct are often either non-existent or not enforced. Notwithstanding many different constitutional arrangements, distributions of power and wealth, and political cultures, most of the countries in the region share a huge array of social, economic and security problems, including high levels of corruption in all layers of public administration, weak institutions, abuses of power, and organized crime. Whereas inter-state wars appear to be a thing of the past, most countries share an extremely high level of criminal violence. Brazil, as well as Central American countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador in particular are all among the countries with the highest murder rates in the world.

In addition, the leftward political shift the region experienced over the past decades has not led to the necessary security sector reforms. In most cases, the political establishment profits from the lack of transparency in security sector governance; individual politicians often derive personal power and, in some cases, financial ben-

enefit from their relationship with elements of the security forces. These incentive structures preclude reforms that would increase transparency and the rule of law. The left-wing political forces that gained power were either part of the authoritarian left in the first place (and thus disinterested in progressive pro-democracy security governance reforms) or assimilated quickly into the existing order, leveraging their benefits to stay in power. As in Southeast Asia and Southern Africa, there is low pressure from parliament or civil society to reform the security sector or governments. Most political systems in the region are designed to have strong executives, and parliaments appear content with having very little oversight of security sector issues, including defense spending. Despite the high levels of insecurity faced by people on a day-to-day basis, few parliamentarians specialize in security policy issues.⁹ While many human rights organizations are highly concerned about security threats, most civil society advocates concentrate on human rights and social issues. This is commonly explained by several related factors. Importantly, security is often regarded as an issue that is »owned« by the political right in the eyes of voters. At the same time, while the military is often seen as an important and reputable institution by citizens, organized civil society sees security institutions as so abusive and corrupt that any attempt to reform them could only backfire on any progressive reformer bold enough to try.

Notwithstanding vast differences within and across the three regions, in all of them, outside support to security sector reforms comes mostly from big bilateral partners and multilateral organizations such as the UN (including the United Nations Development Programme) and the European Union (EU). These donors are generally interested in stability in the respective country or region, and in increasing the effectiveness of the security forces. In Southeast Asia, along with the EU, the United States (US), and Australia, who belong to the biggest donors, big international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Asia Foundation play a role. Many of the state-driven interventions are focused on training and equipping the armed forces. One key example from Latin America is the US-supported »Plan Colombia« in the first decade of the 21st century, which focused on training the Colombian security forces in their fight against rebels in the Colombian conflict. As in this case or in the US investment in the Armed Forces of the Philippines, a majority of these outside efforts have focused on improving the effectiveness of the security forces to respond to se-

curity challenges as defined by their countries' governing elites (such as internal armed conflict), not on the political reforms necessary to improve democratic security sector *governance* as a whole.

3. Using the Power to Convene: FES Activities on Dialogue and Support to National Reform Constituencies

Promoting democratic peace and human security is one of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's key aims. FES' approaches in their regional and national programs vary depending on political context, its partner networks, and the resources available. In highly polarized and fragmented political environments, FES often uses dialogue work to prepare for, identify, and accompany processes of potential reform.

3.1 Supporting Regional Dialogue

In Southeast Asia, the foundation initiated, co-sponsored, and supported an Inter-Parliamentary Forum on Security Sector Governance (IPF-SSG) together with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) from 2006 to 2016. The Forum was led by a Steering Committee that included members of parliament from Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand. The explicit goal of the yearly forum was to »promote ongoing dialogue and exchange of good practices among members of parliament in Southeast Asian countries,«¹⁰ including democratic control over the security sector. Once a year, the IPF-SSG brought together 30 to 70 participants including members of parliament, parliamentary staffers, government and security sector officials, officials from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, civil society representatives from the region, and international experts from outside the region. The Forum focused on »promoting an improved understanding of the role that parliaments can play in security sector governance« and »fostering a regional dialogue on the role of parliaments in security sector governance« in the words of the organizing partners.¹¹ Topics discussed at the conferences included parliamentary accountability, defense budgeting and procurement, police and justice reform, regional governance formats, and the role of security sector reform in peace processes, among various others.

In Southern Africa, FES has supported the Southern African Defence and Security Management Network (SADSEM) since 2004. SADSEM was established at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa in the 1990s as a network of academics and security sector practitioners from across the region who were committed to strengthening democratic control. The network conducts trainings for civilians and members of the military and police in its member countries; these trainings include security academies and higher-education facilities, among others. Using its alumni and other stakeholders, it promotes research and discussions on security sector governance in the SADC region. Since 2010, FES has supported SADSEM in organizing the »Maputo Dialogue,« an annual conference on security policy in the region at which between 25 and 45 participants from around ten countries take part. These participants represent SADC, national governments and armed forces, civil society organizations, as well as universities and think tanks. Topics at the conferences range from the African Union security architecture and African peacekeeping to security around elections and the role of donors and NGOs as security agenda setters. In response to a specific request by its regional partners in the region, FES also supported conferences on Maritime Security in 2013 and 2014, a topic that has been a recurrent theme of FES-supported security conferences and publications in Africa since 2006. Issues discussed at these conferences included maritime security governance, the maritime dimensions of the African security architecture, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, the geopolitics of offshore energy industries, and counter-terrorism.

In Latin America, given the relative lack of interest and innovative ideas coming from the left on (domestic) security policy, FES project activities aimed at helping progressive actors develop new concepts and build new coalitions for a modern and more democratic security governance on the national and regional levels. To do so, the foundation supported a region-wide progressive agenda for *seguridad pública* (public security) and *seguridad ciudadana* (citizen security)¹² that takes a broader view of security needs and seeks to reorient security institutions towards delivering those needs rather than protecting the state, the government, or the institutions themselves. In 2003, the FES office in Colombia (FESCOL) started initiating regional security debates with a focus on civil-military relations, defense, and regional security (i.e. conflicts between countries in the region). The first project initiated

by FES Colombia focused on bringing together members of the military, politicians, and academics from Colombia and Ecuador at a time of high tension between the two countries. This allowed FES offices to realize that such dialogue could be successful in kick-starting conversations on a regional level. As a result, these offices expanded their activities to hosting debates in the Andean region and Brazil. They sought to enable progressive actors to develop new concepts for regional security cooperation on topics that were directly or indirectly related to parts of SSG/R reforms, such as civil-military relations.

Since 2009, the FES regional project, managed by the Colombia office, has been supporting biennial conferences on organized crime that have also featured discussions on judicial and police reform, democratic security governance, corruption, and private security actors. In addition, FES hosted meetings on regional security with parliamentarians between 2011 and 2015. Each of these meetings convened around a dozen parliamentarians and up to 20 subject matter experts for discussions on security-related topics.¹³ Topics included the militarization of public security, new functions of the armed forces, and state control of security and defense, as well as strategies for progressive alliances looking to strengthen democratic institutions.¹⁴ Drug policy reform was a key focus from 2012 to 2016, in particular in Uruguay, Colombia, and Mexico. While the IPF-SSG meetings in Southeast Asia were focused on SSG/R concepts in a narrow sense, the meetings described above were deliberately framed more broadly as discussions on »regional security.«

This regional-level work led to the creation of national working groups in several Latin American countries that were led by national experts and fostered debates on security policy. The national working groups commissioned policy papers on both domestic and regional security issues. »Classical« security policy themes such as defense and control of the armed forces were gradually replaced by themes such as organized crime, police, justice sector reform, and drug policy reforms. Due to competing priorities, some FES offices phased out their national working groups on security after a few years. In some countries, including Colombia and Ecuador, the groups still meet today, almost fifteen years later.

3.2 Supporting National Dialogue and Reform Agendas in Colombia and El Salvador

Since 2003, the FES office in Colombia has regularly hosted meetings bringing together relevant actors from civil society, academia, politics, and the security sector to discuss security challenges in Colombia and within the region. Formats varied from a national conference on violence and governance to small-scale informal working groups on police and military reform that brought together representatives from security forces and military and police colleges.¹⁵ These meetings were both hosted and chaired by FESCOL. The topics discussed over the past fourteen years were at times closely related to SSG/R, such as military training issues, the role of human rights in military rules of engagement, the de-paramilitarization of security forces, and post-conflict policing. More often, however, the topics were much broader, and included the Colombian peace process as well as security and foreign policy in general, municipal security in specific places like Bogotá, citizen security agendas, and democratic security. Depending on the composition of the groups (which changed over time), FESCOL would also commission policy papers to focus the discussions.

FES work in El Salvador is another example of the possibilities working on a national level can create. In this case, working to support national and local reform constituencies was the focus.

Throughout the last twelve years, FES support to its partners in civil society and the security sector in El Salvador made a unique contribution despite a tiny budget compared to other organizations and bilateral donors. FES established an office in El Salvador in 1989 with the aim of contributing to the implementation of the peace process and the consolidation of the new democratic state. In 2004, FES began focusing on networking and cooperation efforts with the goal of aiding democratic, progressive, and center-left forces in conceptualizing, outlining, and addressing citizen security in public policy. Between 2005 and 2009, FES supported two political reform agendas, one at the local level in the municipality of Santa Tecla and one at the national level.

In Santa Tecla, work consisted mainly of promoting debates among academics and politicians on citizen security policies that would be more in line with a progressive perspective. In 2005, the local government of the mu-

nicipality of Santa Tecla, part of the metropolitan area of San Salvador (comprising approximately 130,000 inhabitants), requested FES support in developing a new security approach. Mayor Oscar Ortiz wanted to pursue a prevention-based approach of »citizens' security« as an alternative to the conservative policy of the »Strong Hand« (*la mano dura*). The mayor and his advisors envisaged a more inclusive and participatory citizen security policy, which would be based on longer-term cooperation and engagement among the institutions, organizations, private businesses, and inhabitants in the municipality. FES supported his agenda by funding El Salvadorian advisors and consultants that it drew from its network of former FES scholars (its »*agentes de cambio*« program). The three-year action plan the municipality developed focused on five areas of work: citizen participation, inter-institutional coordination, legislative reforms, municipal infrastructure, and communications. Additionally, they developed four municipal programs for societal violence prevention: a scholarship program, promotion and activation of sports clubs, education and outreach on municipal ordinances, and a childcare and tutoring program for children of the vendors in the municipal markets.¹⁶ All this was accompanied by the development of a municipal communications strategy that produced and disseminated appropriate information on citizen security efforts. These communication efforts also helped raise the needed financial resources for the municipal programs and projects.

Ortiz also encouraged citizen participation in public affairs, through the creation of a roundtable on security and coexistence that was supported by FES and the Foundation for the Study and Application of Law (FES-PAD, the similarity of the acronym is coincidental), an organization that had already previously partnered with FES. This roundtable was made up of municipal leaders and coordinated by an alderman, with support from an institutional technical unit that was later incorporated as a municipal sub-department. The municipality committed 14% of its budget to the implementation of its citizen security policy. In 2006, at the request of the municipal government, FES supported another project with FESPAD to help develop a knowledge-generation program that could provide technical and policy capacities to municipal staff to allow them to implement their innovative ideas.¹⁷

The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) recognized the municipality's contribution to improvements in

public health and the urban environment. PAHO noted that interventions to recover abandoned recreational areas and green spaces (24 and 70, respectively), the construction of a museum, cultural center, and water park, and expanded public lighting, repair of public roads, and renovation of abandoned lots, in some cases with help from the local communities, had been particularly fruitful.¹⁸

In 2009, after four years of applying the concepts on co-existence and citizen security, the municipal government of Santa Tecla identified the need to reformulate the municipal policy and action plan to address new trends and emerging local issues. It once again asked and received policy support from the FES, which served as a facilitator and advisor but did not implement any projects directly. It also helped share the Santa Tecla experience with other countries in Central America, producing greater commitment and ownership among the municipal authorities to continue and improve the initiative.¹⁹

Meanwhile, on a national level, FES work in El Salvador shows how the foundation's dialogue activities can support the development of political reform proposals on security sector governance. FES supported the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), the left-wing opposition party at the time, in developing progressive positions on security policy as part of its platform. The FMLN was elected in 2009 and has been in government ever since. In the two years leading up to the election, FES provided the space for relevant party members and members of civil society to form a working group and hold regular meetings about the participants' reform agenda. FES support was especially crucial, because working directly with the former rebels-turned-opposition party so shortly after the civil war entailed risks that no other international actor was willing to take. Only a few aspects of the program were implemented after the FMLN won the presidency, however, and FES all but stopped all of its SSG/R work. The establishment of the National Council for Citizen Security, which allows for the greater participation of civil society and clergy in discussions on public security, was among the implemented measures.

4. Outputs and Impact: Initiating and Strengthening National Debates through Regional Dialogue

In many cases, the concrete results of dialogue work or similar support projects are hard to pin down, which is one reason why many donors shy away from such activities in favor of concrete deliverables they can more easily report on. However, the work of FES on SSG/R in South-east Asia, Southern Africa and Latin America yielded five main outputs – three directly stemming from regional dialogue work, and two more on the national level.

4.1 Enabling Open Discussions in a Climate of »Closing Spaces«

Given the current climate of »closing spaces« for civil society and political activism, organizing dialogue on a regional level can at the very least provide rare opportunities for open discussion, even among participants from the same country, who would not dare to have such discussions at home. In this way, and by inviting progressive participants (see *Lessons Learned* below), the regional dialogue activities support progressive actors by showing them that they have allies in their region as well as in their home country.

Even after the military coup in Thailand in 2014, for example, having Thai participants in regional conferences made it possible to support a minimal level of conversation between progressive actors inside and outside the Thai security sector. As one international NGO partner of FES put it, these »regional project[s] are] a strategic resource. If at the national level you have constraints, you can still invite people, revive contacts, and discuss issues that you can't discuss on the national level. So they don't feel left alone. [If you stop regional dialogue,] they feel that the foreigners don't care anymore. We need to show them that they do.«²⁰

4.2 Generating Entry Points by Discussing Broader Issues Relating to (In)security and Safety

In some contexts, simply the phrase »security sector reform« invokes resistance. Unlike local activists and politicians who should be free to criticize and debate the core

governance challenges of their countries, international experts must respect such resistance, especially in light of the harm done in the past by imposed technocratic reforms in many countries. Holding regional or national dialogues on security issues outside of narrow security governance can help start other conversations. The goal of supporting security sector reform must not be any particular model or institutional change, but to help local voices create a more open debate about the challenges of security and power, and design their own institutional setups to meet these challenges. Talking about key security issues such as regional security or organized crime – as in Latin America – brings together different societal groups from a country. This, in turn, serves to build trust and thus establish the foundation for more specific, possibly sensitive, and provocative discussions on the role of the military in society, for example. Discussing matters of (in)security and safety in and of itself helps strengthen the capacity of civil society representatives and politicians to engage in national debates on security governance and its challenges. Furthermore, learning the local vocabulary of security and understanding the formal and informal specificities of communication among security insiders helps outsiders signal competence and thus establish authority for their policy arguments. This can also help in identifying the themes and terms that actors in their respective national contexts are most comfortable with and want to start discussing more thoroughly amongst themselves.

4.3 Building Bridges, Trust, and Creating New Networks

In several cases, dialogue supported by FES offices on security policy provided the first opportunity for a civil society activist, an academic, or even a politician to have a serious conversation with someone from the security sector, and vice-versa. The workshops and meetings hosted by the foundation have helped spark initial interactions, increased the interest of progressive political actors in engaging on discussions on security policy, and have created new networks between a diverse set of actors that may have never met before.

In the Southern African region, for example, participants from civil society and academia appreciated that the Maputo Dialogue helped them get access to policymakers from SADC and the African Union for the first time.

One participant of the Maputo Dialogue described the process as follows: »SADC is a very closed organization. People work with people they trust and know. And you can only know people if you work with them. So if you are not invited to SADC conferences, there is no way to get to know them. The SADSEM conferences helped to open doors and meet SADC officials. It is really useful to come here for the networking and exchange that it provides. I got many of my interviews and ideas for my research here.«²¹

In Thailand, a few academics who worked on security policy said that they had never met an official from the military or police face-to-face before participating in FES dialogue activities first regionally and then on the national level. Further, the dialogues are credited for having created a »level playing field« between participants, deemphasizing the extreme social hierarchy between military or security officials (top) and civil society activists (bottom). Even after the 2014 coup, when FES stopped working on SSG/R at the national level, some study group members remained connected and engaged in conversations that they argued could be revived once the political landscape changes again. In addition, members of the security elite can benefit by learning to critically reflect on their institutional assumptions and engaging in debate with representatives of the societies they (usually) claim to serve. Convening countless dialogue sessions on the Colombian peace process and regional security issues in Latin America, for example, enabled the FES office in Colombia to engage with members of the security elites on more specific discussions on SSG/R, in this case on police reform. In Myanmar, meanwhile, although security policy is still firmly under military control, it was possible to invite members of parliament, both military and civilian, including representatives of the defense and police sectors, to attend the regional IPF-SSG and discuss democratic governance of the security sector.

In addition, participating in such discussions helped inspire parliamentarians to consider further engaging the executive branch of their government on security policies. This is a first step towards strengthening civilian control of the military. In Latin America, participants in regional dialogues pointed out that parliamentarians from different countries appreciated meeting counterparts from other countries interested in similar issues, as well as well-known Latin American experts on the subject matter.²² Participants noted that exchanging views

with regional experts was particularly valuable, and that it helped create a feeling of »permanent collective discussion« of progressive views on security matters.²³ The interactions facilitated by FES were not limited to politically like-minded actors, however. Multiple people that attended the meetings found that FES brought together people with differing political positions »who would otherwise never sit at the same table.«²⁴ In Colombia, for example, FES invested »many years of painstaking efforts« to bring union leaders and generals to the same table for the first time.²⁵

4.4 Triggering National Level Dialogue and Injecting Ideas Into National Conversations

The question of who controls the means of violence, surveillance, and enforcement is at the core of the idea of national sovereignty in most societies, at the very least among ruling elites. SSG/R is therefore essentially a national process. While not entirely inoculated against the spread of global or regional norms, it is far too close to the sensitive core of the domestic distribution of power to be driven or shaped by multilateral or even supra-national governance mechanisms. As such, it would be unrealistic to expect regional events, much less dialogue alone, to directly impact national policy in this way. However, the examples of IPF-SSG, SADSEM, and the FES-supported dialogue work in Latin America show that regional dialogue can expose potential change agents to ideas and opportunities that provide a starting point for national discussions on SSG/R. These efforts empower local demand for questioning the status quo and holding a debate. FES has taken up this demand through its investments in national and local change agents as well as reform constituencies, as the example of El Salvador demonstrates.

Over the course of its existence as an FES-DCAF partnership, the IPF-SSG helped launch national-level conversations and activities in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, as well as Myanmar (albeit in a more nascent stage and only in 2016) – that means in half of the countries that had sent participants to the regional meetings.²⁶ These multi-stakeholder dialogues were hosted by a local organization, such as the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, the Philippine International Center for Innovation Transformation and Excellence in Governance (INCITEgov), or the Thai King Prajadhipok Institute (KPI).

In turn, the members of the national multi-stakeholder dialogues were involved in various in-country SSG/R initiatives, such as a national security policy that included SSR (in the Philippines), a senate inquiry into SSG/R (Thailand), or a national conference on SSG/R (Cambodia). According to one of the participants, »the IPF-SSG has served both as a regional platform for parliamentarians and an incubator of national SSR dialogue processes in several Southeast Asian countries.«²⁷

Regional dialogue activities also contributed by organizing inputs for national dialogue activities – this involved bringing in experts from the region or sending members of national working groups to regional or international conferences. One FES partner remarked that the IPF-SSG in Southeast Asia triggered experience-sharing between parliamentarians from different countries. »They don't usually talk to each other on security issues,« one international partner of FES noted, adding that »there was a big gap related to sharing experiences regionally, which the [IPF-SSG] platform aimed to close.«²⁸ The regional dialogue in Southeast Asia also allowed participants to contextualize their respective experiences. As one participant from the Philippines observed, »my presence there [in Bangkok] was important.« He found this to be the case for members from other countries as well as himself, as the sessions provided him with a perspective on »what one has and what one has to work on at home.«²⁹ Seeing how state-society relations in the security sector work in other countries triggers questions in participants, sometimes for the first time, such as: Who is pushing for and who is resisting reforms on democratic control of the security sector? What are the incentives of the different actors? Which actors, other than the state or among different state bodies, have legitimacy in the eyes of the population?

Sometimes, the ideas triggered by regional dialogue sessions were more specific. In 2011, after, conference participants in Maputo discussed the need for national dialogue on security policy, the Malawian government began to work on developing a national security strategy with input from SADSEM members from the Muzuzu University in Malawi. In Namibia, a SADSEM-supported academic established an »emerging school of military studies,« enabling him to offer more trainings and courses on security sector governance.³⁰ By supporting SADSEM, FES helped change agents such as the academic in Namibia or the university in Malawi promote

democratic control of the security sector in their home societies.

In essence, then, in many cases, starting with regional dialogue work was a necessary requirement for eventually sparking work on the national level. In Latin America, some conversations on regional security could be highly sensitive and political – such as border issues. Usually, however, regional dialogue provided the opportunity to talk about issues that were too sensitive politically to address on a national level first, so that these could later be addressed in national working groups. The working groups hosted by FESCOL started working on police reform per se only after first inviting members of the Colombian police to regional-level broader conversations and then painstakingly building relationships nationally over several years. Topics eventually discussed included how the role of the police in Colombia needed to change following the 2016 peace agreement, and how to provide security for the population in rural areas previously ruled by the military, by paramilitary groups, or insurgents. Years before, FESCOL had already published a book on the challenges that the police would be confronted with after the peace agreement, organized public events, and hosted in-depth discussions on changing the police for their new role in a post-peace agreement Colombia. It needed the long-term trust-building effort and preparatory work in order to use the window of opportunity eventually presented after the peace agreement to have more political conversations about police reforms. After spending years building trust, today, as part of the training for police colonels in line to become generals, FES is one of the institutions colonels visit in the process. So every future leadership group in the Colombian police is now discussing thorny issues in police reform as part of their training with FES staff and other Latin American experts.

4.5 Formulating Concrete Policy Proposals for Better Security Sector Governance

The proposals developed by groups of progressive actors at FES-hosted national-level discussions in El Salvador fed directly into the 2009 party platform of the left-wing FMLN party that took power in the 2009 elections. Key members of the FES group would take up government posts, including Mayor Oscar Ortiz, who is still Vice President, and Jaime Miranda, who was foreign minister from

2013 to 2014. For many politicians, the case of Santa Tecla had demonstrated that a non-repressive approach, implemented by local governments, could be effective if it was built on strong political leadership and fostering social consensus. The reform constituencies supported by FES in Santa Tecla had an actual policy impact. FES partners in El Salvador directly linked the project in Santa Tecla and its prevention-based approach of »citizens' security« to a reduction of the homicide rate in the municipality. In 2005, Santa Tecla was among the 22 most violent municipalities out of the 262 municipalities in the country; by 2007, Santa Tecla was no longer on the list. According to data from the Medical Examiner's Office and National Civilian Police, the murder rate in Santa Tecla fell from 92 homicides per year in 2005, to 53 in 2011, 23 in 2012, and down to 17 in 2013.³¹ As a result, Santa Tecla turned from one of the most dangerous to one of the safest municipalities of El Salvador.

In the Philippines, various IPF-SSG and national multi-stakeholder dialogue on SSG/R participants became members of the Aquino government (including at the cabinet level) that formulated the first ever National Security Policy with a focus on SSG/R. In Thailand, one of the IPF-SSG participants became chair of the Thai Senate inquiry into SSR that formulated recommendations for SSG/R in Thailand.

5. Lessons Learned: Adjusting Political SSG/R Assistance to Contexts

What can international supporters of security sector governance or political security sector reforms learn from these examples of supporting dialogues and reform constituencies?

The country-level political conditions that create windows of opportunity for real political change in security sector governance appear to be relatively rare. Renegotiating the balance of power through authority over the means of violence – i.e. the state's security forces – is not something that foreign actors can achieve. It is a high-risk, very difficult process that can succeed only if truly led and implemented by local political leaders, and that requires a high degree of ambition and commitment for change as well as the capacity on leaders' part to act as a professional political advocacy group. Donors need to be ready to provide tailored assistance in these cases – assistance

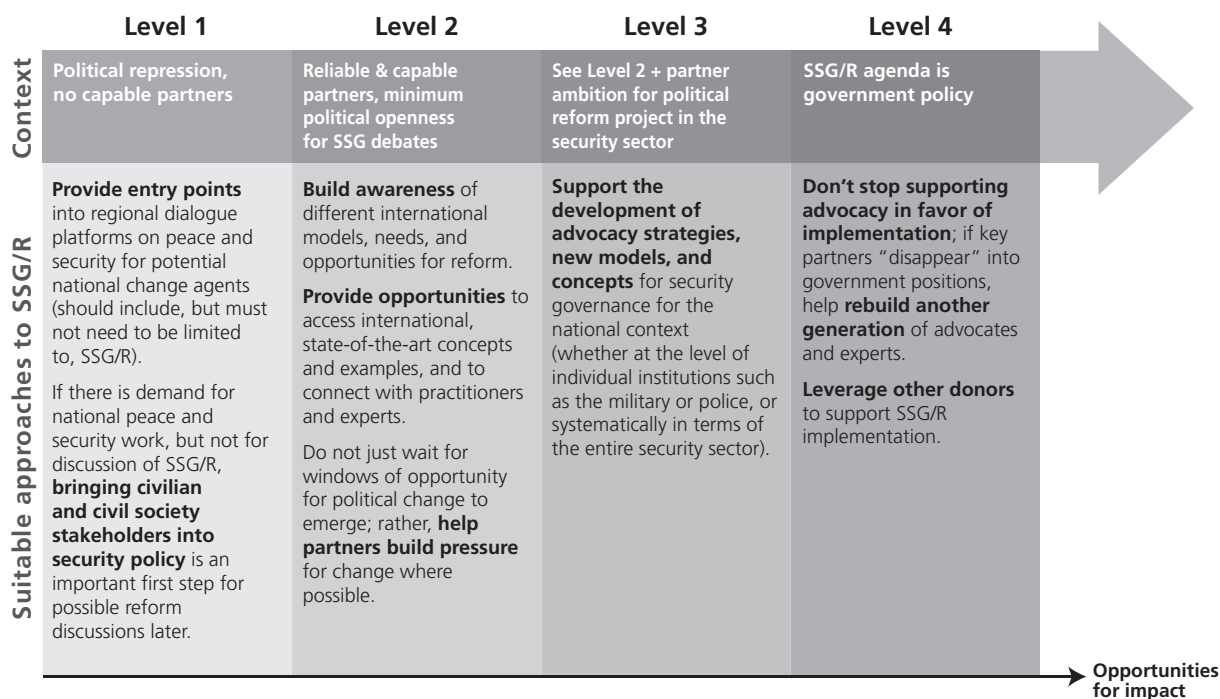
that is most effective if they can leverage deep trust and extensive relationships built over many years of being present in country.

Clearly, such windows of opportunity can only be exploited if capable local reformers are already in place – it is too late to start capacity-building programs when the moment for possible change is already there. To provide safe, sustainable spaces for intellectual exchange and political networking for possible reform agents therefore appears to be the most effective way to prepare the ground for those rare moments when major political change becomes possible. These spaces, particularly at the regional level wherever the national political space is closed, remain woefully insufficient. Such dialogues require substantial work to prepare well, are comparatively expensive, easily ill-designed or misinterpreted as wasteful junkets, and they do not produce tangible or quick results to show to domestic constituencies, which explains why few donors engage in these long-term dialogue support. When well-designed, however, such dialogue efforts present a clear opportunity for donors to make smart investments into medium- and long-term progress in security governance, stability, and peace.

Four ideal-typical contexts (see figure 1) could be used as a guideline for selecting the most realistic extent and most promising shape of SSG/R work. These ideal types should be understood not as a rigid step model, but rather as an attempt to illustrate different context conditions and their implications for the kind of work that may be most effective. Many countries will stay on one level for decades. Countries that are working on the second level and have sustained national demand from partners may have to fall back to the first level. For example, the FES office in Thailand had to stop its national dialogue activities after the military coup.

At a minimum, a first level of such SSG/R work would feature a regional dialogue as a platform for networking. Where national conditions do not allow effective SSR/G work, isolated activists could at least benefit from the opportunity to network and sow the seeds for future, larger engagement (Level 1). In countries with a permissive political climate in which partners have the capacity and interest to work on SSR/G-related issues (Level 2), external actors could provide a platform for building awareness and facilitating dialogue, perhaps even to help partners build pressure for change. In places where there are also

Figure 1. Suitable approaches to SSG/R work in different contexts.



capable and normatively aligned partners that express a realistic ambition to drive a political project for actual security sector reform (Level 3), external actors might support projects with much more specific (and openly communicated) activities, as FES did in El Salvador with the FMLN. Finally, in those few cases where reform ideas have become official policy (Level 4), the challenge is to move beyond implementation by continuing to provide support and furthering advocacy.

The key lessons for donors for engaging in political SSG/R support are well known by now, but continue to be insufficiently implemented. The following lessons can also be read as key challenges and conditions for success: the more effectively they are tackled, the more effective the political approach becomes.

5.1 Contextualized, Long-term and Flexible Approaches

As with any form of external political support, political assistance to security sector reform and governance is more likely to be effective when it is long-term and flexible. Political change is not linear, so support to political SSG/R reforms cannot be tied to linear yearly budgets or programs either. Outside actors need a thorough understanding of local and regional politics. FES in Latin America was most effective and most well connected when it had a security policy infrastructure on both the national and regional level at the same time. National level-connections are important to a) gain and sustain trust and long-term relationships, b) to identify the right participants for dialogue activities as well as national change agents, c) paying sufficient attention to the political sphere, d) to suggest the right themes and e) experts, all while f) following a sequential approach. Only then will it be possible to eventually make progress in discussions and move from more general security issues to more sensitive, specific debates, and finally to political transformation.

a) Trust of Participants in the External Organization

In every context, all of the results the foundation achieved depended on the military, politicians, and civil society gaining a better understanding of each other's perspective. In societies in which the military has a his-

tory of coups and supporting suppression in particular, this trust-building will take a long time and be crucial to any other steps towards political reform. A quintessential condition for bringing people together was participants' trust in the organizers. As a political foundation, FES has been present in many countries for decades. This means that it had a comparative advantage vis-a-vis other outside donors in terms of the trust of and relationships with a broad variety of actors. These strong relationships meant that FES was able to bring actors to the table that did not trust each other in the beginning, or that might have been unwilling to participate in policy debates on the security sector if these were hosted by another organization. In most countries, the foundation is seen as more neutral and more able to create a »level playing field« than any domestic organization, despite its clear ideological leaning. In the case of Southeast Asia these efforts were supported by the neutral Swiss-based DCAF, which were perceived as an impartial and neutral SSG/R provider of professional expertise. However, due to its long-term presence and relatively small size, FES is seen as more »local« than other international donors.

b) A Good Balance of Participants

The right mix of partners and participants does not only refer to gender and age but also to ideological leanings, political status, and the different segments of the security sector. Some participants, for example, need to be senior (i.e. often older) enough to have influence and deep knowledge. For the work to be sustainable and to be able to build long-term relationships, however, it is also necessary to work with mid-level or more junior members of the security sector as well as civilian experts that have a real ambition for change. Whether or not the participating »established elites« are very progressive is not central. Their added value is highest if they work on the central themes connected to reform agendas in their respective organization. Civilians are best placed if they are in some way involved in an oversight function for the security sector – no matter if that is within the sector itself, in political parties or parliament, independent oversight bodies, the media, or civil society. The successful FES supported dialogue groups have included a mix of politicians, university experts, think tanks, civil society representatives and security sector officials. Often, it is members of the security sector themselves who are the most critical of their own institutions. Their added value is

highest if they work on the central themes connected to reform agendas in their respective organization. Building these broader alliances increases the likelihood of implementation of political reform processes.

c) Participants From Across the Political Spectrum

In the experience of FES, there are only a few participants who regularly attend meetings. Particularly when it comes to parliamentarians and politicians, supporters of dialogue and reform processes will always face a dilemma. On the one hand, most other participants would like more politicians or at least their staff to participate. They make the discussions more politically relevant. On the other hand, the quality of discussions improves when participants attend regularly instead of changing all the time, and politicians are usually unable to attend regularly, given time constraints and election cycles. Involving MPs in most countries is a very long-term investment. They will often not be specialized, and there is very high fluctuation – in parliament generally, but also regarding committee membership. The work of FES has shown that given the difficulty of working with parliamentarians and the need to increase capacities on SSG/R in parliaments and by civilians in the executive, a successful dialogue should also include politicians' staffs, party members, committee staffers, and, importantly, civil servants from a middle-management level from the executive branch. Furthermore, independent oversight bodies that report to parliament, such as national human rights institutions, ombudsman institutions, or anti-corruption bodies, should be included as well. Their participation addresses the challenges of lacking capacity for dealing with security policy affairs, as described above. Especially in countries with highly autonomous security forces and where the parliament lacks the political clout and ambition for effective democratic oversight, a reasonable intermediate step is to strengthen civilian control within the executive. This control is implemented – and often shaped to a considerable degree – by the top levels of career and/or politically appointed civil servants in the executive branch.

d) Choice of Topics

FES experience has shown that initially and in order to establish a more or less steady group of people, it is important to choose topics that are most relevant to those participants whose participation is most crucial. In some cases, this will mean that the initial topics have to be quite technical and follow the short-term agenda of the existing security policy debate. Such topics might not in the first instance be related to security governance reform agendas and progressive issues, but they can help attracting the right participants from the security sector in the first place. In the case of IPF-SSG, for example, the initial regional meeting started with a broad range of topics, which enabled participants to familiarize with the concepts and scope of security sector governance, after which more narrowly defined conference topics were selected in narrow consultation with the Steering Committee (e.g. budget control, defense procurement, justice reform or police governance).

e) Regional Expertise is Key

Dialogue projects run by international organizations and outside actors often run the risk of bringing in too many outside experts – often Western and white – that lack a clear understanding of the region required to be really relevant to the experience of the participants. While the FES also brought in the occasional Western expert, by virtue of its long-term presence in the regions, FES enjoyed a large network of regional experts that it was able to bring in. Partners in all regions indicated the importance of FES access to expertise from the region, as opposed to just German or European expertise.

f) A Sequential Approach

In the experience of FES staff in Latin America, it took a very long time (in some cases several years) before participating members of the security sector started to engage openly and provide details of internal dynamics in their bureaucracies. In particular, it was a long while before national dialogues were set up as a result of regional meetings. Once this point has been reached and there is a steady group of people that trust each other, the group can move towards thinking through reform efforts. In these cases, FES staff found it productive to encourage

debates on controversial topics – as long as they are well managed and moderated – and to ask questions about previously taboo subjects, such as talking about legalizing illicit drugs before anyone else in the Latin American context, or democratic governance of the security sector in Myanmar. Once there is sufficient trust between members of the group, constructive controversy and thinking through innovative policy ideas makes the discussions attractive to its participants.

In the event that political sensitivities do not allow for a discussion of concrete political reform agendas, or when there is no high demand for specific trainings on SSG/R, like in the SADSEM region and parts of Latin America, it is most useful to conduct regional dialogues that politicize peace and security issues. This can be achieved by creating »security communities« including members of the military and academics, politicians, and civil society activists who discuss these issues more openly. This is also relevant when there is neither high demand for specific training on SSG/R nor specific proposals for reforms on democratic oversight and security sector governance.

In Southeast Asia, the dialogue model was designed to introduce specific concepts and paradigms for security sector reform (e.g. justice reform, police governance, defense procurement, democratization and SSR). In this case, the demand for basic knowledge (»What is SSR? What are the key ideas and concepts?«) as well as specific examples from other countries is high, while the regional format, with a mix of regional and extra-regional resource persons (e.g. DCAF), provides a less sensitive platform for dialogue than national conversations. External expertise, as well as discussion of abstract concepts and their applicability in a regional and national context, provides a good starting point for national multi-stakeholder dialogues in Cambodia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

5.2 National Actors with Capacity and Ambitions

Both of these models of dialogue formats can be started and maintained independent of the question of whether there is substantive national work on SSG/R in the region. Where national conditions do not allow effective SSG/R work, isolated activists can therefore at least benefit from the opportunity to network and to sow the seeds for

future, larger engagement. In this way, regional dialogue can essentially form the backbone of any external SSG/R strategy.

To truly move from dialogue to reform discussions and constituencies on the national level, there will have to be national actors with the ambition for and capacity to push for reforms. Where there are few such actors, there is a limit to what targeted political support from the outside can do. In such cases, donors and other external actors that have the resources and know-how can provide technical capacity development for parliamentarians or civil society representatives.

5.3 Sustained Long-term Support to Reform Constituencies

Even in those few cases where reform ideas have become official policy, the challenge is to move beyond supporting implementation by continuing to enable advocacy. It is also important to switch gears and start to support and build up a second generation of civil society advocates once the first generation has changed roles (e.g. taken on political roles). As one FES partner put it, FES was helpful to furthering reforms, because it »looked at the politics. Who are the points of power? Who is giving up power to whom? What will be the implications?«³² The answers to these questions will always change over time, and donors need to be willing to adapt their strategies to changing political environments. In the long run, progress will depend on recruiting new change agents.

In El Salvador, many FES partners entered government, eventually leading FES to scale down their engagement. In their new positions of power, partners had new opportunities to implement agendas for change that they had previously developed with FES support. At the same time, these change agents found themselves in the unfamiliar terrain of thorny internal politics within the ruling political elite, not all of whom were equally progressive or ambitious when it came to security sector reform. The set nature of executive roles limited even very high-ranking individuals to their specific portfolios. After these partners entered government in 2009, local partners characterized the political reform agenda as stagnant. While the project in Santa Tecla is a success story and the municipality continued to work on related reforms, this example illustrates the necessity of continu-

ously supporting the original partners (in this case the municipality) or starting similar efforts elsewhere in the country even after political change. Progressive experts point to the Santa Tecla project as an exemplary model for the whole of Central America, yet the approach has yet to be adopted in any other Salvadorian municipality.

5.4 Managing Partners and Donors' Expectations alike

It is important to maintain realistic expectations. Regional dialogue platforms will hardly ever have any direct impact on national policy other than by triggering the interest of national change agents or by injecting ideas that will have an impact at a later stage. Real and thorough political reforms are highly context-specific and as such, highly local. They most often happen in very specific moments in a country's history. Therefore, a key lesson from FES' work is that triggering national level initiatives is a realistic level of expectation for regional formats.

Endnotes

- 1 This paper is a slightly modified and abridged version of the two printed analyses: 1) Sarah Brockmeier, Philipp Rotmann, »Sparking Change in Security Sector Governance: Investing in Agents and Alliances for Change in The Philippines and El Salvador«, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (ed.). 2) Sarah Brockmeier, Philipp Rotmann, »Stimulating change in Security Sector Governance: Supporting Regional and National Dialogue«, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (ed.). The authors would like to warmly thank Mario Schulz for excellent research support, Pierre Ortlieb for editing this paper and Katharina Nachbar for support with the graphic. They are grateful to all FES staff and partners that took time to talk to them for this paper.
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22 Interview with Central American Member of Parliament, conducted on 8 July 2015 in El Salvador and interview with FES staff, conducted on 8 July 2015 in El Salvador.

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About the Authors

Sarah Brockmeier is a research fellow at the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI) in Berlin. She works on conflict prevention, German foreign policy and UN peacekeeping.

Philipp Rotmann leads the work on peace & security governance at the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPI) in Berlin.

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Global Policy and Development
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Konstantin Bärwaldt | Peace and Security Policy

Phone +49-30-269-35-7501 | Fax: +49-30-269-35-9246
<http://www.fes.de/GPol/en>

To order publications:
Christiane.Heun@fes.de

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